FAMILY TRANSITION AT MARRIAGE 131

Marriage transfers the boy into the adult farm-owning man, the farm father into the old man; it brings the same changes for the women. Such changes are, of course, not abrupt; the groups which are substantially of the same age do not undergo disruption with the movement of one of their number from status of boy to that of man. But, on the other hand, there are general patterns of behavior which mark off these groupings in an informal manner, and which betray their origin in a social valuation of age differences.

The behavior of the different age groups is of the most intimate everyday kind, and consequently reflects those differentiations of status which are given formal and explicit recognition at marriage. Felt to be too natural a part of daily life to require explanation on the part of the farmers themselves, their behavior, nevertheless, is very easily remarked by the observer. In the ordinary countryman's house, for example, the man of the house and whatever older men may be present occupy chairs drawn up before the hearth. The hob by the fire belongs to the old couple by right. The younger people, the sons and daughters, sit behind them round the room on other chairs or on the window seats of the rectangular kitchen, which makes up the principal room of the usual small farmer's house. This arrangement shows itself best in the *cuaird* or visit, where the old men of the district drop in on neighbors and "friends" to sit around the hearth together passing the evenings of winter in conversation, singing, discussing the news, and telling the old stories of legend and folklore. At the *cuaird* younger men and women, if they attend, sit behind, usually leaving the center of the stage to the old men, and the children stand up behind in silent admiration. The younger men have their own pursuits, of course, though at present the divergence may be more marked than formerly. Lately, in Clare at least, they have taken to card playing on a gambling basis for stakes of small livestock in the country districts.

182 554 621 888 through rural life under normal circumstances is not toward a greater and greater prominence in the activities of the young men's group. Rather, there comes a time when one must break away altogether. One faces perforce a new orientation of sentiment and a new kind of behavior. Growing old brings many more changes than the physiological.

888 573 885 554 The case of the newcomer, John Quin, already described, shows the necessary changes. In Rynamona it is brought out very clearly in the clique to which he first belonged and to which we have referred at various times, calling it once the "intermediate."

[551] The clique we name so met at the house of one Joseph McMahon, more commonly known as Oscair (the Hercules of Irish saga) for his physical strength. Oscair was a rural carpenter with only a very small plot of garden and his house. But he was a good singer, a jokester, and a repository of folk tale, though he was not much past forty. He lived just at the edge of the slope leading from Kilnaboy Commons down to Rynamona. The townland was what would be called in urban sociology an "interstitial area." It was higher, rougher, and more craggy than Rynamona and Kilnaboy, lying between them. Its inhabitants were descendants of people evicted from round about who had squatted there. Most of them were "died out and left," and the place was always poor. It acted as a sort of outlying fringe of Rynamona.

The men who collected round Oscair's fire were aged thirty-five to sixty. Just as their ages were intermediate between fully old and fully young, so was their habit here. They very seldom played cards. Talk was the order of the day, enlivened by Oscair's humor and ballads. A few of them spoke of the affairs of the village with some weight. The rest did not. Those who came were as follows:

a. Young Mackey, from the village, the man recently married, still too young for the old men's house.

1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Clare

888
888
573
885
554

b. Moroney, the sixty-year-old, "strongest" (richest) farmer of the village. One of the few who spoke with weight.
c. Young Roche, son of the very old man, still unmarried but entirely in charge of the farm he would soon inherit.
d. O'Sullivan, a herdsman, from near-by, who was a stranger in the community but had won himself a place, despite his being a landless man of sixty-five, by acting as the local veterinarian. He spoke, too, with weight.
e. John Quin, already described, who spoke here with weight.
f. Two forty-year-old Pilkington brothers, unmarried, from the Commons, very small farmers, most often silent.
g. Oscair himself, whose role was to entertain.

Of these men it can be seen that only Mackey, Moroney, and John Quin could make the transition to full farm-owning, farm-father status of old men. Mackey had years to pass before he could so do. His eldest child was very young and he himself not long in possession of his farm. John Quin, in a somewhat anomalous position, could and did move onward. In doing so, as we described, he felt it necessary to break away completely from this group. This he did, with the result that the group, itself never stable, fell to pieces. Moroney, as we remember, had a disagreement with the villagers and would not attend the old men's gatherings.

What was it then that brought these men together? The authors could get no answer from the men themselves, other than their amusement with Oscair and, in Moroney's case, a guardedly phrased dislike of the villagers. Yet, through observation and interview in the community, it became clear that they were all passing through a similar transition. Oscair's visitors were not a stable clique, nor too faithful in attendance. Both young Roche and young Mackey were still going occasionally to the young men's meeting at the other Roche's house, but both felt too great responsibilities for gambling and cards. John Quin gambled heartily enough

1 Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Clare

888
573
885
554

but was more and more impatient with the "playboys" of young fellows. Old Moroney was gruff and lonely. The others were neighbors of Oscair's and, being poor or landless men, felt awkward going elsewhere. O'Sullivan could visit as he pleased, for, as the local "vet," his word carried weight, but, always a stranger in sentiment, he felt most at home here.

The intermediate clique was a product of similarity of interests, in contrast to the interests of other better organized groups. Its members were in some way or another a little different from the ordinary old or young of Rynamona. Some of them were remote topographically, but not all. Some were without full community status, but not all, and some of a transitional age.

Oscair's house was thus a sort of catchall for those whose position in Rynamona was not clearly defined. It was intermediate between the clearly defined groups, and for the small farmers, such as Mackey, Roche, and Quin, was a halfway stage in their advance from the status of young men to that of old.

The progression of which this is the halfway stage is an upward one, metaphorically speaking. It leads no longer to a greater role as "playboy" but toward full family and community status. It leads to a new behavior and new personal desires, more highly valued. One's discarded status and one's discarded behavior fall away into lesser esteem. In terms of this progression we can understand the attitude of the old men on the behavior of the young ones. It is a transitory, impermanent, unimportant thing. It is a "codology." "When they grow older," one old man said, "and become married, they will meet just as we do."

What shows itself in Oscair's clique is a transitional state. For a moment were gathered here those who could move upward, like John Quin. Gradually, they could attain full status. Oscair's hearth for them was a roadside resting place.

1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Clare

With these intermediates were gathered the representatives of another anomalous social place. Both Oscair and O'Sullivan, the "vet," were important figures in the community. Their occupations and their skills won them respect and admiration over the countryside. O'Sullivan, the older man, was free to come and go wherever he might wish. But both were "landless" men. They could never attain full peasant status. In the identifications of Irish familism, they were condemned to celibacy. Neither could feel comfortable in the old men's *cuaird*. There was no place for them except, as Oscair's behavior showed, as playboys and entertainers. So they too must occupy an interstice in the structural alignments of rural social life.

8:Arensberg E-5 (1932-1934) 1937
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

593 seen together at the local markets, but it is the father who does the bargaining. Their attitudes are in agreement with this arrangement. Once I asked a countryman about it at a potato market in Clare. He explained he could not leave his post for long because his full-grown son wasn't well enough known yet and was not yet a good hand at selling. If a son in Luogh and other Clare communities wants a half-crown to go to a hurley match, he must get it from his father. The son may earn money in employment off the farm, on the roads, [465] or as a labourer, but even then he is expected to contribute everything he receives to the household, as long as he remains on the farm. Very often, as the author saw in Luogh, in work on land division, the old fellows will walk to the pay-off to collect for themselves the wages their sons have earned.

You will say, perhaps, that all this has a very familiar ring; it is characteristic of closely knit farm families everywhere. So it is, but we are prone to disregard the familiar; we forget that the familiar stuff of life has often more important implications than the exotic. In the Irish countryside we must not undervalue the familiar. For the implications of these factors of family life are the signposts along the road.

593 885 In the countryside this subordination of the sons does not gradually come to an end. It is a constant. Even at forty-five and fifty, if the old couple have not yet made over the farm, the countryman re-

8:Arensberg E-5 (1932-1934) 1937
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

mains a 'boy', both in farm work and in the rural vocabulary. In 1933, a deputy to the Dáil raised considerable laughter in the sophisticated Dublin papers when he inadvertently used the country idiom in expressing country realities. He pleaded for special treatment in land division for "boys of forty-five and older"—boys who have nothing in prospect but to wait for their father's farm. For 'boyhood' in this instance is a social status rather than a physiological state. A countryman complained to me in words which tell the whole story. "You can be a boy forever," he said, "as long as the old fellow is alive."

Had we more time we might devote a long inquiry to this relationship, to its affective content, to the mutual respect and pride of father and son. The Irish countryside values the stern father perhaps more highly than the indulgent one; the peasant father takes great pride in a sturdy successor and competent fellow-worker. Camaraderie and intimacy may not flourish between them; but deeper-felt affections underlie formal respect and gruff command. The Irish mother, compassionate, indulgent, is of course a counterpoise to this stern paternality. She has an emotional role in the balance of reciprocal sentiments as indispensable to the family's existence as the economic role she plays. Freud might illuminate us about the sort of conflicts such a human structure engenders, but he has little to say of the far more important, and

8:Arensberg E-5 (1932-1934) 1937
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

182 ships. He may never attain such a view of himself, of course; from his point of vantage, he is a staunch 'friend' and a loyal son and brother. The balance, which we can see objectively, is to him a deep personal intuition.

Now I face the question: How does this balance maintain itself? What does it imply for him? The point round which the balance revolves is marriage. As we have seen, the 'west room' takes its aura from a change which comes over the parental couple; the 'boy' reaches adult status when he marries and inherits the farm. The family and the land are both involved in this crucial reorganization.

[885]

584 Country marriage in Ireland follows an ancient and widespread pattern. It is called 'match-making' and it is the sort of *mariage de convenance* involving parental negotiations and a dowry which is nearly universal in Europe. In Ireland its importance is such as to make it the crucial point of rural social organization.

To describe the match one has to sink one's teeth into the countryman's way of life. For the match is made up of many things. It unites transfer of economic control and advance to adult status. It is the only respectable method of marriage and the usual method of inheritance in the Irish countryside. It is embedded in the Gaelic tongue, in joke and story, and in folklore.

A match usually begins when a farmer casts

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

you some borrowed article made of steel, an old shoe should be thrown after you, and special charms recited. A knot should be tied in the tail of a horse which is to be sold. If a tinker takes a fancy to your horse you will be wise to sell, for 'he will take the good out of it whether or no'. And if you buy an animal you should put a handful of earth on its back to ensure that you have also purchased 'the luck of the beast'. It was at the fair that a man proved his adult status by his ability to hold his own at buying and selling, and a favourite theme of the stories which raise a ready laugh at the fireside concerns the simpleton who exchanged his cow for a worthless trifle.

The old countryman is not ashamed to try out, often with success, his age-old bargaining methods when making purchases of standard-priced goods at a shop. For the shop has taken over some of the traditions of the larger less personal world of the fair. Not only is a certain amount of haggling expected—and enjoyed on both sides of the counter—but there is a communal interest in the outcome. Thus it is held that you should never be alone when making a purchase. And there is an old belief that money earned in a particular way should be spent on some special purchase, for example there should be some 'egg money'—normally the woman's earnings—in the cash set aside to buy a horse in spring. Reference has already been made to the tradition that if you sell a hide you should buy something made of metal with the money. In parts of the country there were certain things which it was thought should never be sold though they might be given away—a kid for example. And in Mayo milk might be given away but would be sold only in secret, and it used to be an indelible disgrace for a woman to sell butter: it was regarded as a sign of abject poverty.[1]

It is perhaps because of the anonymity which the bustle of the fair confers on the buyer that certain classes of goods tend to be purchased there rather than at a shop. One of the remarkable features of an Irish fair is the quantities of old clothes and boots on display, and I am told that there is a considerable export of second-hand clothes from Scotland to the country fairs of Northern Ireland. Sir Walter Scott commented on this

[1]P. Knight, *Erris in the Irish Highlands*, 77; C. R. Browne, *Ballycroy*.